



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 29, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Good Friday: Tenebrae

Sermon Text: [Matthew 27:38-54](#)

God on Trial Evidence

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Throughout the Lenten season, we've been looking at how God is on Trial, how Jesus is crucified, and how He is betrayed. When you think about a trial, what is one of the most important things is the **evidence**. The evidence proves that someone is guilty or innocent.

When we look at God, when we look at Jesus, there are many people that have questions about who He is and they question the evidence. It was no different for the people at that time. We hear the words that they say to Jesus. Imagine you were there at the crucifixion. What words would ring out to you and surprise you? What words would shock you? Here are some of them. As the Jewish leaders go by, they said, **"He saved others, but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"** "Just show us the evidence! If you're the Son of God, come down! Prove your claim!" But they are saying it quite sarcastically because they didn't believe him. We heard others say these words, **"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."** [\(Luke 23:37\)](#) Those soldiers mocked him. "If you're really a king, well, you don't really appear to be a king. What evidence do you have of being this great king?" Then even passersby, they said this as they were going along the road. They said, **"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"** They mock Him. They want to see this evidence that He claimed that He was the Son of God. Finally, we see the two people being crucified with Him. Even they mock Him and are looking for this as well. In the Gospel of Luke, He writes that one of the criminals says, **"Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"** [\(Luke 23:39\)](#) The mockery but also the requests, "Show us! Save us! We are suffering, if you are the Messiah, save us!" All these phrases, all of these claims are kind of coming from the same idea—proof and evidence.

Do you know anyone in this world who is seeking proof for God? Do you know anyone who is seeking and doubting that there is a God? "If God would just show Himself this way, then I would believe in Him." "Science proves everything this way, so if God was true, this would be done in a different way." Or, "There is way too much evil in the world. There is no way that there can be a God if there is so much evil. If God was around, He would destroy all the evil!" There are so many people that speak words like this or "Just show me a sign! If God really wants me to believe in Him, wouldn't He just show Himself to us?"

Many of the people in this world are no different than the people at the time of Christ's crucifixion. They were skeptical of His claims and were looking for the proof of who Jesus was. They were demanding evidence and proof of who He is.

What are your responses to the people today? What are your responses to the people shouting at Jesus at that time? You may feel angry and say, "How could you say that?! Don't you know who He is? You saw His miracles. Why would you say these things? Why would you doubt who He is?" But maybe you would wonder in the same way. "Why isn't He doing anything? He did all these miracles. He could feed 5,000. He could raise others from the dead. He could heal the blind and deaf. So why couldn't He come down from the cross? Is He really that powerful? Is He really the Son of God, who He says He is?" Many of us are affected by these questions. Many of us might have these doubts at times and say "If God really loved me, would He let this thing happen in my life? Would He let this sadness, this heartbreak, would He let me have this disease? Why would a loving God let this tragedy happen?" Do we seek proof in the same way that these doubters and mockers seek proof?

Maybe in the same way that we look at the world and we say, "Christianity is declining. There aren't any Christians. If God was real, wouldn't He show Himself and let the Christian church grow?" Or, "Looking at society, morality is just getting so bad. Where is God?" Don't we sound just like those people beneath the cross saying, "Where are you, God? Show yourself!" Maybe we need to look closer.

We need to look at what the people said and understand that they actually answered it, but they didn't understand. As they were crying out, they said "He saved others. Why doesn't He save Himself?" That's such a good question. If He could save others, why doesn't He save Himself? Why couldn't the man who raised the dead protect His own life? That "why" question is in fact answered by a question that Jesus asked when He says, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** Here we see Jesus call out God the Father. He calls out to the God who has now forsaken Him and caused Him great pain and agony. He caused Him to suffer, not just the same suffering that the criminals on His left and right were suffering, not just this physical pain. What was He suffering? He was suffering the agony of sins for you and for me and the whole world! Though He

was innocent, though He had done nothing wrong, He was suffering for all of us the wrath that you and I deserve. As we put those nails on the cross, let each one of us think about that multiplied by every person in the world now, multiplied by every person that ever lived in all Creation. What suffering!

So the answer to the question of "Why," "Why doesn't Jesus do this...," or "Why would God allow this...," is answered that Jesus was willing to suffer and die for you and for me. Though we might doubt and question why something might happen, we do not have to question God's love because God's love is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's not just that God loves you. It's based on something true. It's something that happened in history. Jesus came to this earth and died for you. When we talk in pre-marriage counseling, we ask if love is an emotion or a feeling. Partly, but more than that, it's an action. Jesus shows His love by his action of dying on the cross for you and for me and for the sins of the world.

So the answer remains the same. Where is God? Your God loves you so much that He died for you to take away your sins. He sent His own Son to be that sacrifice. What does that mean? How do we know that this means something? We see the evidence pay off. The evidence of Jesus' suffering on the cross, maybe it's the words that He gives as He forgives the people crucifying Him, but one of those criminals next to Him, one of them that was mocking Jesus, maybe it's through those words or maybe it's the way he suffered, maybe it's the way he showed love and kindness, we don't know, but the Holy Spirit worked. We see that this criminal confesses and says "That man is innocent but we are getting what we deserve." He calls to Jesus and says "Remember me in your kingdom." Jesus gives those beautiful words and says, "Today you will be with me in paradise." ([Luke 23](#)) Today, after suffering this horrible death, that man would be in heaven. It's true that this evidence meant something, not some amazing, powerful, not some miracle that Jesus did but that simple suffering.

How does Jesus continue to show that simple evidence today? We read about it in [Isaiah 55](#). His Word; His Word goes out to you and me, His simple words that create faith in us, that forgives our sins, and shows us God's love. But we also see it in simple things—the simple water of Baptism and what we took part in tonight, His body and blood that forgives our sins. So we see the simple work of Christ. We don't have to doubt but believe. We see that evidence play out in another way.

As Christ dies on the cross, we see what happens. The earth shakes. The curtain rips in two. As darkness comes over the land, what does the centurion and the soldiers around Him say? ***"Surely he was the Son of God!"*** They could not deny it.

The truth is that Jesus is the Son of God, the One who forgives our sins, who takes away our sins. We know it is true. He has given us the proof. We look upon the cross to see that proof. There is no question that Jesus is our Savior, the Savior that we need. We

don't need a God who is going to give us this evidence or this proof that "I want in that way," because He gives us the proof and evidence we need most—forgiveness of sins. It's something we could never earn on our own.

So His refusal to come down from the cross to save us, that's the proof we need that He does love us. As He cries out to God, He gives up His soul. He gives up His life. As He suffers hell for you and me, we see the proof of His love. We see, as He cries out ***"It is finished,"*** we know the work is done and we do not need to save ourselves, but we have been forgiven. Our works can add no more. So if you need evidence, if you need proof of who God is, if He loves you or not, then look to the cross. We look to see that Jesus loves you and it's a fact that you can hold onto for today and tomorrow, knowing you are forgiven and you have eternity with Him. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.